

MEMORANDUM

May 12, 1975

TO: Governor

FROM: Ralph

RE: Vietnamese Refugees

This past weekend, Joel Aggergaard from Emergency Services and I spent most of the weekend in the refugee processing area of Camp Pendleton, California. It is ironic that the refugee encampments are only about a mile from the compound where President Nixon lives and it appears that all of the 20,000 or more refugees who are now here are being treated in an equal fashion, including former Premier Ky and other high-ranking cabinet government officials from the former South Vietnam government.

These are the first evacuees from Vietnam and most appear to be highly professional people. Nearly every family has one or two English-speaking people within the family and communication is easy. We anticipated that there would be a lot of unhappy scenes here, but that is not the case. These people appear to have been acclimated to camp life for nearly a week in Guam and now nearly a week here waiting for their papers to be processed by the United States government. They are getting use to camp life and it appears that most people are happy. At least they are happy with the fact that they are safe here, they are receiving meals and clothing here, and they are away from the hysteria and problems of those last few weeks in Vietnam. Relatives are being located and relocated and families are getting together in the camps. The ages vary from newborn to very elderly people, but the United States Marines who are managing and assisting in camp life indicate that there are very few problems with sickness, with the exception of colds. Most people here are colder than hell, and I imagine that will be the biggest problem in resettlement of any of these people into Washington State. Our climate is just plain too cold for them to get use to right away.

As I indicated, it appears that most of these people are in former middle and upper class people in Vietnam. More than half of the 20,000 here already have sponsors. They are being located and sponsored by friends that they had in the United States from former friendships in Vietnam and businesses or agencies that they worked for in Vietnam.

Yesterday afternoon while we were in Camp #5, where nearly 5,000 people are living, an executive from Bank of America came in to talk to the commanding officer. He had a list of 123 former Bank of America employees from Saigon and he was rounding them up. The Marines weren't swamped with time and weren't being too cooperative and this business executive got very upset and mad. He said, "These are our employees and we're going to stand up and assist them now in their time of need. They worked for us and were loyal to us for years in Saigon and it is our corporation's responsibility to see that they are assisted now that they are here in the states. We want to find them immediately so that they don't have to endure any more hardships in the camps." There appeared to be a lot of corporations doing this same sort of thing.

In the processing center I went through a number of forms filled out by individual refugees who do not have sponsors. I randomly picked ten forms out of the file and read the occupations of each of these people. These were the top ten on the pile at that time. They read as follows: 1) aircraft mechanic; 2) physician, 3) dentist; 4) university teacher; 5) university-trained junior executive; 6) seminary student; 7) housewife; 8) aircraft mechanic; 9) aircraft mechanic; 10) aircraft mechanic. Believe it or not, that is pretty typical of what we are seeing in the type of refugees at this time.

Processing Procedures

Each individual refugee or head of household is being required to process through Immigration and Naturalization Service here at Camp Pendleton. Each individual refugee is filling out the forms for citizenship, these forms are then sent to Washington, D. C. to be reviewed by two or three different agencies for security purposes. None of the forms are back to Camp Pendleton yet and therefore no refugees will leave until these forms come back indicating that there are no security problems. All Vietnamese refugees must go through this system. They are then issued a Social Security card to become eligible for employment.

Secondly, a register with the HEW here through their Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services.

Thirdly, sponsorship is handled by five or six voluntary agencies here, primarily working through Catholic Refugee Services, Church World United, or Lutheran Refugee Service, American Red Cross, etc. Each refugee or family has to be certified for sponsorship before they leave a camp. Sponsorship is a moral obligation only and requires indications for financial support for the refugees until employment can be found, housing, shelter, etc. Before any refugees will be sent from Camp Pendleton to individual states or other locations, the refugees will be counseled and asked if they agree to go to that particular location.

There is also counseling offered by the Department of Labor and a voluntary agencies here are working on child care, citizenship courses, and basic English courses. We sat in on one or two of the basic English courses and there seems to be a good deal of participation in that throughout each of the refugee camps.

The new procedures authorize release of groups of refugees to groups of governments, states, cities, United States corporations, communities, etc. If the refugees indicate a willingness to want to participate in that particular program.

We should be involved in the selection of refugees.

I suggest that we assign one of our Emergency Services personnel to come back down to Camp Pendleton this week for two or three days to work with the various refugee camps in providing information about Washington State and finding which refugees would be interested in resettlement possibilities within our state. Perhaps through the Asian American Commission, or a number of our Vietnamese employees, a letter could be drafted in Vietnamese to the refugee population here indicating the type of climate in Washington State and other problems they might have with relocation in our state and explaining what kind of a program we have to offer. Also, we should be available here to answer any questions the refugees might have. The State Department will pick up expenses for our people there and do everything they can to assist us there in the camp. They will provide us with an office, phone, etc. for our state government representative here.

We are the first state to become involved in the refugee program and the only state that has stepped forward with a willingness to help I think we should assign a man to Camp Pendleton immediately at State Department expense and begin to fulfill our obligation. In many ways, this is an ideal situation. We will be able to pick refugees who want to come to the State of Washington, perhaps have professions or backgrounds that we need in our state and resettlement should be far easier.

There have been a lot of rumors about gold in the camps and refugees carrying large amounts of money. Most of these people, even though they have a tremendously good background, are penniless. They left Saigon or surrounding communities with 15 minutes to 2 hours notice and only had the clothes on their backs. We simply must crank up our refugee assistance programs and volunteer agencies in Washington State to provide warm clothing for these people, because they are going to be damned cold in the Pacific Northwest. There are a few here that have lots of money, but it is very few in numbers and I am sure that their resettlement will be handled here in California.

Life in the camps.

It appears that camplife is settling down and people are getting use to living here and are making arrangements for their next step in resettlement into the United States through one of the individual programs. Camplife has been absolutely equal regardless of former backgrounds of the individual people. As I indicated, General Ky is there in Camp 8, as are a number of other Saigon officials and former high-ranking military officers who are scattered throughout the various camps. It is a tent city with about 18 cots per tent. Generally, one family living in each tent, sometimes two families, sometimes three families. They have gone to extremes not to separate families into different tents.

The Vietnamese have their own system of electing leaders here and they have now elected camp spokesman through a democratic process. There are loud speakers operating in each of the camps at all times trying to locate relatives, line individual refugees up with their sponsors and so forth.

Bulletin boards are posted everywhere with information for various refugees and to assist the various organizations in locating individuals.

Camp security is tight. No outsiders are allowed in the camp without a pass, this includes press and you must have a reason to get into the camps. We simply have to be careful not to make a side show of this operation and people should have a reason to be allowed into the refugee areas. A press office has been established here and the press are allowed to travel as they want through the camps, but they have a military officer with them at all times.

The refugees are eating all the time. Most of them arrived there hungry and most are becoming acclimated to the area. They are settling back down to a three-meal-a-day type system, but nevertheless at all times there are lines to get into the mess halls.

Soccer and frisbee seem to be the most popular recreational activity in the camp. There seems to be quite a need for warm clothing and even though the temperatures yesterday were in the 80's a lot of people were traveling around in their heavy marine pea coats that have been issued to each of the individual refugees. We often forget that the temperatures in Saigon run into the 80's, 90's and 100's and when it is 70 degrees it is quite cold in Vietnam. People here are damn cold and I am afraid that will be a major problem when they resettle in the Pacific Northwest. Religious services are being conducted here on almost an hourly basis and seem to have a good deal of participation from the refugees.

The largest medical problems seem to be colds and sore throats. Tuberculosis centers have been established and they are checking people for tuberculosis and lung diseases.

Laundry facilities are primarily outside cold water faucets with small plastic containers to do hand washing. There are no automatic laundry facilities here. People seem to be getting along quite well at the hand wash facilities. Clotheslines have been set up everywhere and one of the requests that the Vietnamese have made to the Marines are Vietnamese music to be piped in over the speakers occasionally during the day, better telephone systems for the Vietnamese to call out to their relatives and friends in the United States, better locator systems to find individual families and friends and small things like toothpicks after meals, which all Vietnamese are very accustomed to, the ability to cook tea in their tents, which they are use to.

I am sure there will be 101 hassels in this resettlement program, but that we as a state can do a good job. I think we should proceed as we've planned and anticipate the first arrival of refugees late this week or early next week.